

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR THE CONSERVATION OF THE BALKAN LYNX

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The Balkan lynx is the most endangered autochthonous population of the Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*). The present distribution of the Balkan lynx is restricted to the border areas between Macedonia and Albania, spreading north into Montenegro and the Kosovo. The population is estimated to be less than 100 individuals. The population's critical status has been known for a long time, but the war-like commotions and insecurity of the region have hindered conservation action over the past years. In 2000, scientists and wildlife conservationists produced a report on the status of the lynx in the southwest Balkans in order to increase national and international awareness. The Balkan lynx has survived only because the border region between the former Yugoslavia, Albania, and Greece were areas with limited access and were partly protected. Important nuclei of the lynx occurrence occur in protected areas, and the Green Belt Initiative offers the opportunity to improve the site protection. Today, the lynx is well known to the public and considered as being something unique – a charismatic flagship species. But to survive, the lynx must be helped in regaining lost ground. A joint international programme focuses on the conservation and recovery of the lynx, its prey species and habitat.